



Family Tree Next Steps: *Finding Stories About Your Ancestors and Their Community*

OBJECTIVE

Enrich your family history by learning more about your family as well as the events in their life and their community. Learn how to find history and stories to complete life sketches and add Memories to your Family Tree on FamilySearch.

FINDING STORIES ABOUT YOUR ANCESTORS

There are many ways to find stories to help you better understand and relate to your ancestors and their families. These include:

1. Get stories from relatives. Start by contacting and asking for the chance to talk to your older relatives about what they remember about their parents. Grandparents, and other relatives. Oral interviews are great, but often require some preparation and techniques for stimulating memories. You should record these conversations since note taking is often distracting. You may find that you need to start with your memories to *prime the pump* to get the relative starting in reminiscing. For helpful hints on oral interviews, see the following web sites:
 - a. www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Oral-History-Interview-Question-Lists
 - b. www.cyndislist.com/oral/general/
 - c. www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/
 - d. www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Quest.html
2. Check what is already on FamilySearch's Family Tree (requires free registration). This may include photos, stories, and documents. Search both the Memories tab and the Sources under Details for each individual in the family.
3. Find documents and records from the life of your ancestor (and each member of his or her family). Documents place an ancestor in a place and time, as well as provide information about family relationships. Check the names of witnesses on documents, as they may be relatives or neighbors. Find documents using:
 - a. The documents tab under Memories in FamilySearch's Family Tree.
 - b. Record hints in the box at the top right when looking at an individual in FamilyTree. These can lead you to documents you may not have seen.

- c. Record search in FamilySearch, Ancestry, MyHeritage or other websites as appropriate.
4. Use Family History Wikis to get links to sites which may have stories, such as www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Massachusetts_Biography.
5. Use Ancestral Wikis such as www.wikitree.com or www.familypedia.wikia.com. These wikis focus on individuals and families rather than instructions and links.
6. Just type your ancestors name into a Google search. If this returns too many hits, do a new search by adding a town, county, spouse's name, occupation, or time period after the name. After looking at the regular hits, click on "Images" and see if there are any pictures of your ancestor online (if your ancestor lived after 1840).

FINDING STORIES ABOUT YOUR ANCESTORS' COMMUNITY

The history of a town, county, state, province, or country can add context to the history and character of your ancestors. Knowing that an epidemic occurred during their lifetime may explain family deaths or even moving to another place to avoid the disease. Wars, conflicts, and other major events may also explain other things in your ancestors' lives. Local events and stories – even though not about your ancestor directly – may add context to your family's lives and living conditions. Ways to gather stories and histories about a place include:

1. Newspapers – There are many newspapers online. Some are stand-alone collections, and others are a compilation of items from newspapers, such as Obituary collections. Many newspaper links will be to current newspapers. Don't lose hope, just seek to focus on Historic Newspapers. Use FamilySearch Wiki or Ancestry Wiki to find newspapers for your area of interest. Some notable collections include EuroDocs (www.eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php), www.NewspaperArchive.com (US), and British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).
2. Local histories – some are available online, but many are in books. A county history may include a story about your ancestor or a close relative. Types of histories and how you locate them vary by time period and location. For example, Germany has many "Ortssippenbücher," which are books created from the records of a town used to make a genealogy of all the people who ever lived there (during the period for which at least some records are available). For more information on German Ortssippenbuch, see www.familysearch.org/blog/en/ortssippenbcher-ortsfamilienbchervaluable-resources-german-genealogical-research/ (explains what they are and how to use them) and wiki-de.genealogy.net/Kategorie:Ortsfamilienbuch, which lists thousands of Ortssippenbuch by the name of the town (this link goes to the A's. See the bottom of the page to go to later letters in the alphabet). There are nearly a thousand listed in the Family History Library Catalog (use the name of the town or parish, then the topic Genealogy).
3. Google Search – type in the name of the town and country or state followed by "history." Do the same thing for just the county or other regional jurisdiction. If a small country, you may want to search for the name of the country followed by history. When you find mentions of an historic event in your ancestors' time period and area, then search for that historic event (natural disaster, epidemic, battle, local uprising, etc.). The details will

help you understand your ancestors' lives even if they are not specifically mentioned in such a history.

4. Use FamilySearch Wiki, Wikipedia, or other Wiki for the area of interest (for example, www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Suffolk_History). These sources may give you links to histories of the area where your ancestor lived.
5. Plat maps – In the United States, plat maps are maps of an area which show the names of the individual owners of each piece of land. This can help you see neighbors, a specific place, or variant spellings of a name. Any of these can serve as clues for further searching.
6. Deeds – Most US counties and some countries of individual counties in a country (such as Yorkshire, England) have deeds to land or other real property. There is usually a central registry for the deeds, which has usually been microfilmed. Indexes may exist to both grantor and grantee (seller and buyer). These deeds can establish when a family moved to an area, when they left an area, and frequently even where they came from or where they went. They may also help establish family relationships (spouses are often mentioned). For the United States, look under the state and county then the subject *Land and Property*.
7. Other – there are many records that may be unique to a town, county, state, or country. For example, there are records of movement between parishes in Scandinavian countries. There are records of child support for illegitimate children (bastardy bonds) in England. Court records can establish stories of litigation, complaints, or crimes. The existence and availability of these records vary by place.

Looking for records about your ancestors can help you begin to understand them and their actions. It helps create or cement familial connections. Happy hunting!